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BEOWULF

CYNEWULF AND HIS GREATEST POEM

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Courthope, in his admirable "History of English Poetry," inclines to the opinion that English poetry, and the study of it, should date its beginning with the poetry of Chaucer*. But lest any might consider that he held the literature of Anglo-Saxon England in too low esteem, he makes later, in the same chapter of the same book the following generous and correct statement†:—"From Chaucer downwards we may distinctly observe in English poetry the confluence of three great streams of thought, which blend in a single channel without any of them ever quite losing its separate life and identity. Of these the first, and perhaps the most powerful, is the genius of Race, the stream of Anglo-Saxon language, character and custom‡ . . . "

Mr. Courthope is not alone in his small estimate of the importance of the literature of Anglo-Saxon England, but few of his opinion have furnished those who may hold in higher esteem this era of our literature such an excellent justification for their study of it. Since literature is an outgrowth of life, where is there a better opportunity for becoming familiar with the genius, character, language and customs of the Anglo-Saxons than that afforded by the study of their literature. Where is revealed more clearly the personality of the race?

The work of those formative years has also another value, the realization of which is forcing itself upon students of English literature. There is a decided literary value that characterizes the written product of the people in England before the Norman

*Courthope, "History of English Poetry," Vol. 1, p. 4.

†Ibid, Vol. 1, p. 5.

‡Mr. Courthope makes certain modifications that are unnecessary to quote. These do not affect materially the statement here quoted.

conquest; and though the awakening to this fact is but a comparatively recent arrival among our American colleges and universities, it has, never-the-less, arrived, and its presence is each year more clearly manifest. The interest in this era of English literature is, indeed, spreading rapidly considering the obstacles, real and serious difficulties, that it has to overcome.

In the first place, the English of the period during which the earliest literature was produced is virtually a foreign language many of whose forms seem more nearly akin to German than to Modern English.

Again, since the increased emphasis laid upon the literary value of this period is of recent date, many teachers of English literature, who may have lacked time, opportunity, or inclination during their season of preparation to become acquainted with these early literary efforts, are, on account of this lack of acquaintance, out of sympathy with them and inclined to minimize their importance.

And then, too, when there are in the domain of Modern English literature such delightful prospects whence one may view the broad and fertile reaches of an enchanted kingdom whose riches are his to enjoy at will, it is easy to forget humble beginnings. Comparatively few voluntarily pause to look at the rock whence they were hewn or the hole of the pit whence they were digged.

It is for the purpose of calling attention to the poetical efforts of a race in its infancy that these papers have been written. They do not pretend to be exhaustive treatises of the subjects under discussion. Such a course, followed, would result in defeating the very end desired—to increase popular interest. Before studies complete in treatment of minute details can be of interest there must be the pre-requisite of enthusiasm.

It has been the intention to emphasize at least three aspects of the poems that we shall discuss:— the historical, the artistic, and in so far as it is possible, the personal aspect. More than this we do not attempt.

If these, and prospective papers of the same general character, serve to increase, or perhaps kindle, in the minds of high school and college students, and others who may have no special

knowledge of this field, an interest in Anglo-Saxon poetry, the mission of these studies will be considered successful.

The lecture on "Beowulf" was originally prepared for use in college classes in the University of Oregon and later it was used in extension work. It appeared some time ago in the "Oregon Monthly" and in response to requests from teachers and others for copies, it was thought advisable to reprint the article at this time. The poems "Beowulf" and "Christ," belonging to two different eras of the same general period, form a sharp and interesting contrast. Both are Anglo-Saxon, yet they are unlike each other in tone, style and theme, the one standing for Anglo-Saxon heathenism, the other representing the fervor of Anglo-Saxon Christianity.

BEOWULF

The Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon poem, the oldest poem of consequence in our language, of over 3000 words in length, and written before 600 A. D. Old, is it not? And you are not interested in old things! Wait; let me set the stage. The country was a sullen land of sodden skies, a land whose shores were swept by stormy seas, a land of grey—grey fogs and mists, grey cliffs, the ocean grey. Nowhere decided brightness, everywhere the soberness of the grey. The people were a folk that dwelt in homes, a folk as serious as the country. Their pleasure was of the kind that hardy men could best enjoy, that we of today would consider to a great degree work. They had feasts, banquets and revels, but these were only occasional and to be accepted philosophically as opportunities for taking on a load of viands and accompanying beverages that staggered the reveller in more senses than one. From authentic accounts their capacity was one that would fill the bibulous man of today with awe and admiration.

Their religion was fatalism. Their supreme deity was Wyrð (Wierd) fate. He was over all and ruled all. Again appears the grey—the threads of fatalism that ran throughout their lives.

But the men nurtured in such a country, of such a clime and with such a creed were of no flimsy stuff. They were strong. They honored strength. To be strong was to be a warrior. To be a successful warrior was to be great. They feared neither nature, man nor divinity. The first storms that swept threateningly against the uncertain footsteps of childhood fanned into a flame of rejoicing a nature that delighted in blasts, found a soul inherited from a race that gloried in fighting with tempests, that recked naught of the wild surges of wind that swept across the whale-road. In combat they knew no fear. Was not Wierd responsible for all that fell to the lot of man? Why fear man? All were in the hands of Wierd, and the warrior leading a beaten

handful cries out defiantly: "The heart shall be harder, the courage keener, the mind braver as our strength decreases." They were in the keeping of Wierd. Their time was allotted to them. Man's efforts could not increase or lessen it.

Such were our Teutonic forefathers—the Angles and the Saxons as they lived in the lowlands of northern Germany.

Now we change the scene. In the early part of the fifth century the dwellers in the land of Britain found themselves in great trouble. For several hundred years they had been under the protection of Rome, who was powerful enough to defend her far away colony from marauding bands. But with the strain upon Roman power on the continent—the strain that ended in the crash of Roman supremacy—came the recall of the outlying legions, and before 450 A. D. the last Roman soldier left Britain and the people were told to look after themselves. This they were unable to do. They had forgotten how. Powerful bands of Picts and Scots crossed their borders and caused great distress. The Britains were powerless to prevent these raids, and in despair they turned to the fair-haired, stern-browed Saxon of the continent. Their petition was granted. The Angles and Saxons sent their fleets and put to flight the invaders. They did more. Finding the land fertile, the country pleasing and the people cowardly, they took up their abode there, ruled the people, and sent word back to their kinsmen to come over and possess the land. They came in hordes, in hosts, made settlements in Northumbria, in Kent, in Essex and Sussex and Wessex, and became the Anglo-Saxons of Great Britain. They brought with them their customs, manners, laws, and transplanted into a new soil their traditions, lays and sagas.

Groups of lays were thus transplanted concerning a historic figure called Beowulf, a warrior of extraordinary strength and daring, of incredible endurance, and, withal, kind, mild-mannered and judicious, moved rather by reason than by impulse, a friend to helplessness, a foe to oppression. There was also a body of story and song concerning a semi-divine personage named Beowa, and it is probable that in the course of time these two became one in the Teutonic mind which united under the personality named Beowulf the legends concerning the two. From

evidence found in the poem itself we know how it came to be written. The scop, or minstrel, the forerunners of a literature, sang or chanted stories of the famous deeds of their hero at feasts, banquets, courts and humble homes, praising this feat or that, contributing a little more or less of extravagance as the occasion demanded, each scop adding here and there a little to themes that elicited greatest applause, until the material concerning Beowulf began to assume the proportions of an epic. Then it is probable that different men attempted to shape different parts of the story into verse, until one, greater than the rest, seeing the wonderful opportunity and being able to improve it, unified the whole into the poem we know at the present day as "The Beowulf," keeping in mind an ethical purpose, and interpolating here and there enough of the Christian element to give it a decided coloring in spite of the heathen sagas from which it came.

This in few words tells how the Beowulf came to be

The poem may be divided into three parts: Beowulf's fight with a monster named Grendel; his encounter with Grendel's mother, and finally his combat with a dragon guardian of a treasure cave, in which contest, though successful, he is mortally hurt.

The introduction concerns the Danes, and tells us about Hrothgar, their king at the time of Beowulf's visit to them. Hrothgar was the descendent—great grandson—of Scyld, son of Scef, which, being interpreted, is, "Shield, the son of Sheaf," and about this is a very pretty story. Scyld came to the Danes from no one knew whither—a child lying in a boat, moved and guided by unknown, invisible power, his head pillowed on a sheaf of grain and about him in profusion heaps of princely treasure. He grew, under the clouds, in honors throve until each one of those dwelling around the whale-road obeyed him and paid him tribute. That was a good king. When he died, we are told that they bore him to the ocean's wave, his trusty companions, just as he, beloved land-prince, had bidden while he, with words, ruled the Danes. There at the haven stood, icy-gleaming and outfooting, the ship with curved prow. The people laid their dear war-lord, the mighty, by the mast, filled the keel with treasure, ornaments,

warlike weapons, bills, burnies and battle-weeds, lay upon his bosom a heap of jewels which should go with him into the flood's keeping, then placing high over his head a golden standard, they let the waves bear their gift to the sea. "And," adds the poet, "men can not now say in sooth who took that heap."

The great-grandson of Scyld was Hrothgar. To him now we pass. The kings between Scyld and Hrothgar had been just and wise, so the people of the Danes had increased in numbers and prosperity, till it came into the mind of Hrothgar that he would build a mead-hall—a great banquet hall—more beautiful and famous than all the children of men ever had seen or heard of, and in time it stood as commanded, lofty and pinnacled, the greatest of halls. Heort he named it. Loud each day rang the harp, the song of joy in the hall. Bracelets Hrothgar dealt at banquets. He was a royal ring-giver. But it was not long before dire terror filled the hearts of the Danish revellers. Upon these warriors living in joys, a wrathful spirit, a mighty mark-stepper, Grendel by name, who held the moors, fen and fastness, began to work upon them great woes. After nightfall he went forth to seek out the high-built hall, and found therein a band of nobles asleep after feasting. Asleep they knew not sorrow, nor misfortunes of men, but the demon of death, grim and greedy, took thirty of the thanes, took them furiously, as they rested, departing after his fill of slaughter, exulting in his booty, to seek out his dwelling.

At dawn among the Danes was a great wailing upraised, a loud morning cry. The mighty Prince Hrothgar sat mourning, the strong man suffered, sorrow dwelt among the thanes. After a night, more deeds of murder were wrought. Again and again Grendel returned, till the surviving warriors fled and empty stood the noblest of halls. For twelve years had Grendel striven against Hrothgar and his men, till among many tribes were his deeds known, and sadly the scop's in song chanted of Grendel's hateful war and his contests continual. Relief seemed impossible. The mighty sat in the council, the wise pondered sorrowfully, all in vain, till at last among the people of the Geats, the strongest man among mankind, strong with the strength of thirty warriors, noble and great—Beowulf they called him—bade to be

prepared a ship for a journey over the swan-road to the land of Hrothgar. Fifteen warriors and a sea-crafty man as pilot went as companions.

“The men shoved out,
Men on a willing journey, the well-fitted wood
Went then o’er the waves by the wind hastened,
The foamy necked-float, to a fowl most like;
Till at the same hour of the following day
The curved prow had traversed the water
So that the sailors then saw land,
The sea-cliffs shine, the mountain steep,
The broad sea-nesses. Then was the sea-goer
At the end of his voyage, * * *
* * * * Thankful that the sea-paths
Easy were found.”

The coast guard challenges the band, and is so awed by Beowulf’s commanding mein and warlike appearance that he conducts them in state to the road that leads to Hrothgar’s palace.

“The road was stone-laid. The war-burnie shone
Hard and hand-forged—the bright ringed iron
Sang in the armor—as they in their war-weeds
Approached the hall. Their burnies rang,
War armor of men; their long spears stood,
Seamen’s weapons, all together,
Grey ash above the armored band
With weapons adorned.”

Again a sentinel challenges them:

“Whence do ye bear your gilded shields,
Grey-colored sarks, and grim looking helmets,
Heap of war shafts?”

And again Beowulf, god-like in strength and beauty, his flowing hair crowned by a shining helmet, over the visor of which kept guard the boar’s head, adorned with gold, shining bright and fire hardened, his beard sweeping a breast armored in battle-weeds of linked steel, which hung from shoulders that topped and squared the frame of a Titan, a frame stout enough to make good

the boasts that fell from his lips—again Beowulf with his proud bearing and wise words wins the confidence of the sentinel, who leads him and his men to Hrothgar.

He tells Hrothgar that he (Beowulf) is the very man the nation has been looking for. Had he not battled victoriously with sea monsters, eotens and nickers? Why should he fear to fight against Grendel? He has heard that Grendel is weapon proof, that his toughened epidermis would only dull a good sword, and that a zealous blow might dent him, but not seriously enough to cause any considerable inconvenience to the monster; so he very modestly scorns, in his turn, to use weapons, but will rather employ his knowledge of the manly art of offense and meet Grendel with naught but his grip, with which he will grapple 'gainst his foe and pull out a victory if Weird so wills.

Hrothgar relates in reply, the trouble Grendel has caused, accepts Beowulf's offer to rid Heort of the terror of the monster, and spreads a mighty feast in the hall. And here Beowulf has an unpleasant experience. A warrior named Hunferth, a jealous Dane, envious of the honors showered upon Beowulf, begins to sneer at him and discredit the reports of one of the most famous deeds of Beowulf's youth, the swimming match with Breca.

Beowulf replies that Hunferth has drunk too much beer and is not entirely responsible for his statements. Notwithstanding this, Beowulf proceeds, with an eloquence inspired by indignation and tinged here and there with bitterness, to boast as modestly as he may of the great struggle. For five days the contest lasted, and Beowulf won. Then, ironically, he continues:

"I have never heard told about thee any such contests. Neither you nor Breca ever did a deed as daring in battle-play, though you were the murderer of your own brothers. You evidently have not caused Grendel much disturbance of mind. But I shall. I shall offer him battle, and when the morning light of the second day shines over the children of men, who will may come to the mead-hall proudly and with safety." Then the king rejoiced, the harps rang, the heroes laughed, and the queen, rising, filled a cup with her own hands and gave it to Beowulf.

All this causes Beowulf to break out afresh and again he boasts, then retires to rest himself for his struggle with Grendel.

But before he could stretch his limbs upon his bed he, all alone, with no one by to hear, boasts again for eleven lines and soliloquizes over the possibilities of the coming campaign with Grendel. Finally, commending himself to God, he falls asleep—to be awakened by Grendel, Grendel reaching for him in the night, Grendel with thirst and appetite whetted by the blood and body of one warrior whom he had just slain; Grendel, who, after stalking over the misty slopes, stood before him with eyes burning with loathsome light like to flame, a monstrous shape, his face wrinkled into wild contortions of fiendish mirth, his voice bellowing in hellish laughter at the sight of so many who he thought would furnish him much food.

But Beowulf, firm in mind and in grip, caught Grendel by the hand—never was there a greater hand grip. Grendel, frightened, sought to flee into the outer darkness; but he could not. Beowulf held him. His fingers cracked, the hall groaned. The mead benches adorned with gold were torn from their places. The Danes howled in terror. The Geats drew their swords, and forgetful that never was the steel of sword keen enough to bite the flesh of Grendel, hacked and hewed at him furiously. Beowulf tightened his grasp, he braced, he pulled. A wound appeared on Grendel's shoulder, the sinews began to part. The bone-frame burst, and, sick of life, Grendel fled under the fen slopes seeking his joyless abode where he should die. What hosts had been unable to do with sword and spear, Beowulf had accomplished with a tremendous "pull."

Then there was great rejoicing, and on the morrow Hrothgar ordered a feast and praised the strength of Beowulf, adopting him as his son and assuring him that no wish of his should go unsatisfied if it were in Hrothgar's power to grant it. He gave Beowulf a golden standard, helmet and burnie, a great jeweled sword, war-horses with golden trappings, and famous weapons. The queen eulogized him, and loaded him with gifts—the mead cup adorned with twisted gold, arm-ornaments, a burnie, rings, a jewel-adorned collar. Beowulf receives all with becoming modesty. The warriors drink, the harpers play; the warriors drink, the scopps sing; the warriors drink, they shout, they drink, they laugh. The warriors drink. They were like Tam O'Shanter—

"glorious, o'er all the ills o' life victorious." Wierd they knew not, and they slept in the hall each where he was when last awake. And the scene concludes with "that was a good folk."

They went to sleep, but one sorely paid for that night's rest. Grendel's mother, a terrible woman, nourished her grief for the loss of her son, till she came forth, greedy and raging, from the fearful waters that she inhabited, to avenge his death. The terror that she inspired was less than that inspired by Grendel only by so much as is a woman's strength less than a man's. The warriors were paralyzed with fear that increased as Grendel's mother, seeing the arm that Grendel left behind him, began to rave afresh. Quickly she seizes a sleeping thane and hurries with him to her fastness in a dark land among cliffs of wolves and dangerous marshes, where flows a stream that pitches into a lake below, which has no bottom and which seethes with fire on its surface—an underground sea, above which are firmly rooted forests—a haunted place of boiling waters rising dark, a place of hateful storms, a place over which the heavens weep.

At morning Beowulf was brought to the hall, where Hrothgar acquainted him with the tragedy of the preceding night, promising much additional treasure if Beowulf will seek out this second destroyer and kill her. The hero welcomes the task, and accompanied by the king himself and a band of warriors, he sets forth, following the foot-tracks of the evil-doer on forest paths, over murky moors, down steep, stony slopes and narrow ways, along straight single paths and unknown courses, past the headlands high and sheer, the abodes of nickers and eotons, until all at once he comes upon her joyless abode, the sea that stretches far and deep, gory and seething, under the ground. There lay the head of the murdered thane. The flood boiled with blood. The warriors blew their war-horns, and dragons, serpents and huge worms turned, writhed and slid into the surging, hissing sea below. Of these Beowulf recked not. Girded with his noble armor, he set his helmet that no flaming war-sword could bite firmly on his head, and stood ready again to grip in battle. Out stepped Hunferth who had jeered him at the banquet and handed to the hero his own sword, Hrunting by name. Never had it failed in fight. Hunferth forgot the words that he spoke when

drunk with mead, and gave his arms to a warrior whom by this act he acknowledged to be his own superior. After a few boastful words—for Richard is always himself in this tale—Beowulf plunged in and the flood took him.

The poem has before stated that this flood was bottomless, but after sinking for a day, Beowulf touched bottom and found, grim and greedy, what he was looking for. They grappled. She wounded him. She gripped her fiendish fingers into his corselet and bore him to her darkest den where she was proof against man-made weapons. Here strange sea monsters attacked him. They were beaten off. Then having drawn the good sword Hrunting, Beowulf struck at the fiend and on her head sounded the ringed blade in greedy war-song. But lo! she was uninjured. Hrunting had failed. Enraged he cast from him the jeweled sword and sprang at her with nothing but his hands for weapons. He hurled her to the floor. Again she wounded him with her claws, and, with her short sword, struck him an avenging blow, but the sword's edge turned upon Beowulf's burnie. Then having seen among a pile of swords an old weapon giant-forged, Beowulf seized the chained hilt, brandished the ringed sword, and in despair struck. The edge bit on her neck. Her bone-rings broke. The steel pierced through her fated body and she fell. The hero turned glad in triumph and saw the body of Grendel, his first foe, lying dead on the floor. In passion he smote off Grendel's head. Into the flood the blood welled forth, and the warriors on the shore above, when they saw the tide stained with red, the waves stirring the clotted gore, mourned and forsook the place weening that Beowulf, their dear lord was no more. But he was safe and was soon swimming up through the water glad in mood, bearing the head of Grendel. The thanes looked back and saw him and turned to meet him with welcoming shouts. He brought not with him the sword of the giants, for the poison of the blood into which it had cut had melted it away to the hilt in Beowulf's hands before he left the pool. The hilt he gave to Hrothgar after relating his adventure at the bottom of the mere. Then in spite of entreaty to remain he and his attendants turned the prow of their ship homeward, laden with gold and treasure.

Upon Beowulf's arrival among his homefolk, the Geats, he

is welcomed with feasts and banquets and praised by his king for the bravery and valor displayed in his combats in the land of Hrothgar, the Dane, about all of which Beowulf has told the king.

Upon the king's death, Beowulf wore the crown and wore it well for fifty winters. He was aged. He ruled well a happy people—happy, till a dragon, who on a high heath guarded a treasure cave in a steep, stony mountain, enraged, because of a theft committed by one of Beowulf's subjects, wrought great woe. With flame and fire provided the dragon went forth breathing destruction upon the bright dwellings of the Geats. There was naught living that the hateful "air-flyer" was willing to leave. The terror was quickly made known to Beowulf who, distressed, his breast swelled with gloomy thoughts, as was to him not usual, prepared for the contest with the fire-drake. He bade to be fashioned a wonderful war shield, all made of iron, knowing well that wood could not withstand the flames of the dragon's breath. He feared not the contest but his soul was sad. Wierd was very nigh. With a band of twelve he sought out the treasure cave and its dragon keeper. Beowulf spake with boastful words, spake for the last time. "I survived many wars in my youth, and now I will—the guardian of the old—the contest seek, with honor work, if me the fell foe from his earth-hall dare seek out." "This is no coward's work," he continues, and advancing alone against the demon smites him a fearful blow with his mighty sword "so that the edge softened." The dragon fierce belched forth the death-fire. Far and wide spread the flame of battle. Beowulf's sword failed as it should not, but Wierd would not permit him to triumph in battle. Again the fierce ones met in strife. Beowulf, surrounded by fire, was in sore distress. His retainers stood fearing—till one braver than the rest, rushed through the flame to the help of his lord—after a long harangue of thirty lines to his followers—and announced to Beowulf his intention—in about fifty words—of assisting Beowulf. Upon them both the angry worm came, the terrible demon "again seeking with fire-waves to consume his foes." The flame billows burned the shield to the rim. Beowulf's sword broke in two from his powerful blows. Then mindful of his former strength, he rushed upon the monster and grasped him about his sharp

and bony neck. With hand burning and life blood pouring he reached for his war-knife and cut the serpent in two.

But this was Beowulf's last triumph. The wound that the fire-drake had before inflicted began to burn and to swell so that he soon perceived that in his breast deadly welled the poison. He seated himself on a stone, bloody, wearied with battle and deathly pale. He knew that he had spent his allotted time of joy on earth. He asked his retainers to bring before him the dragon's treasure. Upon returning from the cave, his warriors found their lord faint and bleeding. They revived him with dashes of cold water till he could speak to them again. He gave the treasure to his people and requested that they make a mound, bright after the funeral pile, at the sea's point which should be called Beowulf's mound. Then from his breast went his soul to seek the judgment of the saints. Again they sought to revive him, but in vain.

Such is the story of Beowulf. The poem is a strange mingling of heathen saga and Christian sentiment, superstitious fear and undaunted courage. In spite of its numerous passages of Christian coloring, it is distinctly heathen. Among the facts that may be gleaned from it—facts that if we had no other evidence we would know—are that the Anglo-Saxons as early as the sixth century had courts and court observances, that they met for great feasting occasions in meed or beer halls. Their very word for banquet is "gebeorscipe," which being interpreted is "beer ship." We learn that they had servants regularly appointed to perform specific duties, that they were a musical people and that no feast was complete without song, nor no king complete without his scop or minstrel.

We learn that they possessed ideas concerning the final disposition of their semi-divinities similar to those held by the Hebrews regarding the supernatural disappearances of some of their prophets. We learn that they maintained the custom of payment for offenses by certain fees or fines, and that even a human life had its specific valuation. We know that they possessed a philosophy that numbers millions of adherents even in this day and generation. And finally we learn that the English language possesses a great poem older than any of its

Teutonic sisters, richer in its beauty, more rugged in its grandeur, more simple and direct in its telling, with passages as lofty as those of Homer, scenes as dramatic as those of Virgil and descriptions as vivid as those of Dante.

In all its variety it is uniformly masculine. Woman appears in its lines, but nowhere prominent enough to take the mind away from the pervading spirit of the masculine. Nowhere does she appear as an instrument of the deities to interfere with the ordained lives of the men of the *Beowulf*. Woman is given her place—an honorable place—whenever she is mentioned, but the men are not distracted from their pursuits or drawn into strife on her account as in the *Iliad* of Homer where Helen of Troy creates domestic troubles of unprecedented proportions, brings woe to warriors and death to many heroes. *Beowulf* does not delight in the caresses that Virgil in his *Aeneid* dispenses to Aeneas from the arms of Queen Dido. Nor do we find accounts of punishment for sinful amours that Dante's poem records. There is not one stroke of the brush to cloud the holiness of motherhood—not one line that makes of naught the obligations of wifehood—not one insinuating word against the innocent purity of maidenhood—not one breath that would dim the radiant lustre that shines from and crowns the nobility of womanhood.

The poem is not softened by any touches of child life. In the *Iliad*, as the warrior goes to battle, he kisses his wife farewell and bends lower to kiss the child that nestles in the mother's arms. But the child is frightened at the war-like appearance of the father, especially at the helmet crowned with a great gray plume that nods and bends so terrifyingly and threateningly that the child draws back in fear. The father understands and smiles as he removes his helmet and again stoops to kiss the babe that this time does not shrink, but reaches up his dimpled arms to assist in the ceremony. The *Aeneid* also pictures here and there the solicitude of the elders for the little Julius. But the *Beowulf* is a poem of manhood.

Though epic in quality it is an anthem of forest, crag, cliff, sea, fen and shore. Not the whirring, fluttering murmur that faintly stirs the air and floats off lightly through the firs, uncertain tremulous, high in the trees, a soft, shy rustling quivering on

the breeze, a song that flings its mounting measure from branch to branch or passes from twig to needle-tip in murmurings somnolent and soothing; droning slumbrous, dreamy, drowsy, low-sung things; not that.

It is another surging song that springs
With sudden swirls, then swells and sweeps the strings
Of a hundred hidden härps—that wildly wings,
That shrieks and swoops, soars, whirls and swings
The forest through in frenzied riotings.
The song in which the pine defies the sea,
A challenge—Strip me of branches. Give me spars
And rope-bound, sail-wrapped, winter stars
Flashing their lances through the frozen air
Shall see me borne by swiftly scudding keel
Before the furious blast, standing all staunch
In spite of strain and tug and desperate plunge
True to my ship, its captain and its crew.

CYNEWULF AND HIS GREATEST POEM

Each of us has his own peculiar misfortune. With one it is excess of riches. With another, it is poverty. One has too many friends, while another may suffer because he has none. Dr. Johnson might have considered the attention of Boswell as a misfortune; but with Cynewulf it was the lack of a Boswell that we must consider his great misfortune, for beyond a few facts gleaned from a few poems that he signed in runic characters*, nothing is definitely known concerning the life of the greatest Christian poet of the Anglo-Saxons. Many articles have been written†, the greater number by German critics, which are full of speculation and conjecture. Attempts have been made to identify him with historical characters of the same name, but these have not been successful, nor have those other efforts that pretend to give an account of his life from his infancy to his death been considered more than ingenious inventions.

If we accept the theory that Cynewulf was born fifteen or twenty years before the death of Bede, which is given as occurring in 735, the poet must have been born, at some time between 715 and 720 A. D. Exactly when, no one yet knows. The conditions in England during the years prior to his birth and also during his life were characterized by constant change. This was particularly true of the political conditions.‡ In the south, Ceolred's§ war against Wessex had followed Aethelred's peaceful reign of thirty years and the abdication of Ine, king of

*Since this curious signature might be of interest, I give it here as it appears translated from the poem, with the words supposed to be represented by each letter:—K, Cene; Y, Yfel; N, Nyd; W, Wyn; U, Ur; L, Lagu; F, Feoh. These mean respectively:— keen, evil, need, joy, us, fortune.

† A small bibliography is given by B. Ten Brink in his "English Literature," Vol. 1, Appendix B. A very full treatment of the theories concerning "Cynewulf" may be found in the "The Christ of Cynewulf" [Cook] published by Ginn & Co., Boston.

‡ A more detailed account of the political history of these years may be found in Green's "Short History of the English people."

§ Ceolred was king of Mercia.

Wessex (726), out of sheer disgust at the vacillating tendency of his subjects' loyalty, left Wessex at the mercy of Ceolred's successor, Ethelbald. The king came to the throne in 716, after Ceolred's tragic death at his own board. During the years between 716 and 726, Ethelbald refrained from war, but when Ine removed from the scene, the prejudice that Ethelbald had against war also disappeared and war began—to last for over twenty years in a desultory way. In 754, however, his troubled and troublesome reign began its conclusion. Ethelbald's entire force was arrayed against Wessex. The battle was raging. The issue was doubtful. Victory might perch upon either banner; but suddenly, in the midst of brilliant and valorous action, Ethelbald turned and foremost fled. Three years later, a company of his own ealdormen slew him.

In the North, however, in Cynewulf's country, the situation was different. Ecgrith, son of Oswin did not care for war. There was to be a season of comparative peace in which Northumbria should stride to the throne of intellectual supremacy in England. There were, to be sure, a few minor struggles with the Picts and Scots just over the Northern border; and once Wulphere attacked Ecgrith from the South, but these engagements only resulted in additional territory for Northumbria.

But after some years, there came a greater rising of these Picts and Scots, in 685, and "in a few days more a solitary fugitive escaped from the slaughter told * * * that Ecgrith and the flower of his nobles, lay a ghastly ring of corpses on the far-off Moorland of Nectausmere."*

During the reign of Aldfrith, the Learned, and his four successors, Northumbria really laid aside the sword for the pen and became the center of intellectual activity in western Europe. But after Bede's death, the storm of human folly and passion again burst forth and Northumbria exchanged her greatness for fifty years of revolt, treason and anarchy.

And now that we have turned for a moment to look into the unsettled politics of Cynewulf's England and have located the poet's advent into these troubled conditions as exactly as possible, we will pause only for a glance at the religious conditions of the

* Green's "Short History of English People."

country before proceeding with our discussion of Cynewulf. Christianity was making headway against all opposition, but the fierceness of opposition had made Anglo-Saxon martyrs. The new religion was comparatively well established before Cynewulf's time, but the memory of its struggles against the old for supremacy was yet fresh enough in the minds of English Christians to act as an inspiration to great zeal. The convert wanted to celebrate his conversion by doing something. If he were a king, he sought the conversion of his people, or donated the site for a monastery or cathedral. Some would copy manuscripts, others would make missionary pilgrimages. The daughter of a king would become a nun and realized her greatest ambition when she reached the high place of abbess. If the convert were of humbler station and without remarkable gifts, he would if possible connect himself with an abbey or monastery and perform menial tasks for those above him as we are told Caedmon did before he received the gift of song. But if the new believer already possessed poetic ability, he would, after his conversion confine his efforts to religious themes.

And now we come to Cynewulf. It is perfectly safe to say that this Northumbrian poet, in common with many English poets of later years, had two periods of literary activity—one of youth, the other of maturity.

There is a sweet-voiced band of singers known as the seventeenth century lyrists. These poets wrote in most instances two kinds of verse—secular and sacred. Their secular verse is not supposed to be the result of or conducive to any great amount of spirituality. It was the song of their full-blooded, strongly pulsing youth in days when differences in personal tastes and opinions were adjusted by the sword. Their sacred verse, however, was the result of a clear vision of the vanity of worldly folly and was redolent with, or at least intimated the advisability of piety. And why should not years bring wisdom and experience a riper judgment?

Now in the same manner did the poetry of the youthful Cynewulf differ from that written by Cynewulf the maturer man. In his youth he was probably a wandering minstrel* or glee-man,

*Ten Brink and Brooke incline to this opinion.

easy, careless, "wicked," he later describes himself, who saw the varying aspects of the life about him, who was of that life, and who wrote of the things he saw as he saw them. The literary work of these early years is represented by the "Riddles," eighty-nine in all, whose popularity was made possible by the wondering attitude of a race that naturally viewed nature as an enemy, that but lately had forsaken its philosophy of fatalism and now was evolving slowly, carefully, thoughtfully, and with questionings into a people striving toward a unity of new purpose, begotten by the comparatively new influence that eventually changed the entire philosophy of the Anglo-Saxon race.

The broad field of subjects covered by these Riddles and his apparent familiarity with each subject indicates that the career of their propounder must, indeed, have been varied. It would hardly have been possible for one who had not had opportunities for close observation and experience to have treated subjects of war, of agriculture, birds, beasts, musical instruments and tempests with the skill and sympathy that Cynewulf displayed in his riddles on the sword, the shield, the coat of mail, the battering-ram; the helmet; the plow, the rake the loon; the nightingale, the falcon, the swan; the ox, the badger, the bull, and the stag; the horn; the reed flute; the storm on land, the storm on sea. and the hurricanes. But a change came upon this life of happy wandering. Its attractive glitter vanished. Travel held no longer the charm of vanity. Princely patronage paled into insignificance before the desire of divine approval. The agency that brought about this change was a vision—a vision of the Rood. Stricken with remorse over wasted years, inspired by the completeness of a pardon that could cover all transgression, desiring to atone, in some degree, for youthful wickedness, Cynewulf turned the course of his song into more serious channels, and applied himself to scriptural themes and ecclesiastical traditions which he brought forth adorned in verse "with much sweetness and inspiration." His greatest poem is "Christ."

The introduction to the poem "Christ" has been lost, but the first word "Kyninge" [to the King] is as eloquent an introduction as the poem needs.

* * * * * To the King
Thou art the wall stone, that the workers once
Rejected from the work: Well it beseemeth thee
That thou shouldst be the head of the noble hall
And join together with firm fastening
The spacious walls with flint unbroken
So that throughout earth's cities all things seeing
May wonder forever. O Lord of Glory!

With such a song of adoration opens the first of the five parts of the "Nativity," itself the first of the three divisions of the Christian poem, "Christ," attributed to Cynewulf. And the vigor of faith, the worshipful spirit, the deep pervading reverence indicates that in Anglo-Saxon, England, some where, two centuries of Christianity had been centuries of amazing spiritual growth. Yes—even less than two centuries measured the time from that condition where Wyrd was "o'er all and ruled all" to the era which acknowledged the "Eternal Creator" as the "Lord of Glory" and the "Shaper of Earth," the "Ruler of Men."

Following these opening lines is an appeal from humanity to the Father, as from one who "in prison sits yearning for the sun's bright course," for mercy toward the race which, by the coming of his son has been saved when it was all depraved. With exclamations of wonder at the immaculate conception, invocation for blessings to rest upon the "Holy Citadel of Christ," "Jerusalem" and rejoicings that the words of the prophets have been fulfilled, that the works of the Hebrews are to be destroyed, joy to be brought to the children of men and their bonds to be loosened, the poet closes the first part of his work and launches into the second with a glowing address to the Virgin. He would know the mystery surrounding the immaculate conception and birth of Christ, and the Virgin though she answers to his speech, does not answer his question further than to say that, "Verily, to men is the mystery not known," but that since Christ was born of woman, the curse against Eve has been overthrown and that man and woman alike may have the hope for eternal salvation.

The third section opens with a dialogue between Mary and Joseph which indicates very plainly that the mystery shrouding the birth of the Savior has puzzled the minds of men before our

century. The faith of Joseph has been shaken by the taunts and ridicule of his neighbors and Mary, troubled, asks, "Must thou forthwith renounce thy troth and leave thy love?" Joseph in his reply tells how hateful speeches, scorn and contempt have been his portion beyond his ability to endure longer.

"'Tis everywhere known that from the glorious temple of the Lord I joyfully received a pure maiden and spotless; and now all is changed through whom I know not. It avails me nothing either to speak or to be silent." Mary in return reasserts her innocence of any crime, asserts her fidelity to Joseph and tells him how that when she was but a child, Gabriel, the archangel, told her, in a vision, that she should bring forth an illustrious son, begotten of heaven, the mighty child of God, of the bright Creator. She bids Joseph dismiss his foreboding and rejoice that he is the earthly father of such a son.

Then the poet ascribes honor and glory to the King of Heaven for his power to work wonders from the time when the command "Let there be light" fell from his lips, to the time when he sent his own son into the world incarnate in human flesh. The coming of that son, brought to man his chance for salvation. Man had been lost.

"The accursed wolf, beast of darkness, hath scattered thy flock, oh Lord, hath dispersed it far and wide. * * * Wherefore Savior we pray thee earnestly with our inmost thoughts that thou speedily grant help unto us, weary wretches, that the mind's destroyer may fall low down to hell's abyss and that thy handiwork, Creator of men, may then arise and come aright unto the noble realm above in heaven whence erst the swart spirit, through our love for sin beguiled and misled us, so that void of glory, we must ever eternally bear misery unless thou Eternal Lord, living God, Helm of all created things, wilt free us the more speedily from man's destroyer."

The fourth and fifth sections of the Nativity are prolonged apostrophes to the Virgin and the Holy Trinity respectively, and breath forth a spirit of devotion that is as eloquent as it seems sincere. The ideas contained are not at variance with those of the orthodox churchmen of today—that is, those held by the orthodox Catholic churchmen, for Protestantism was not

dreamed of when this poem was written. The virtues and power of Mary form themes over which the poet becomes exultant and to the efficiency of which, through the intercession with the Son and the Father, he appeals in repeated prayers for mercy for a fallen race whose soul, in bonds, cries out for life and light. Faith is triumphant. And in the poet's celebration of the Trinity, the picture of the shining throne supporting the Almighty Ruler, cherubim and seraphim, angels wrapt in harmony and beating with their wings, pressing, hovering as near their Lord as possible, fluttering, soaring, swinging and sweeping exultantly in clouds about the throne of the Lamb, ecstatic in their happiness and crying, "Holy, holy, art thou, Lord almighty"—this pictures a scene as splendid as anything that modern poetry and song have to offer us in describing the glory and beauty of that city built without hands, eternal in the heavens.

After his death and burial, he comes forth and in the first part of "The Ascension," ere he hastens to his Father's Realm, Christ recompenses in words of cheer his beloved comrades:—

"Rejoice ye in spirit. Ne'er will I turn away but I will show my love toward you ever and grant you might and abide with you ever to all eternity, and through my grace ye shall never know the want of sustenance. Go now o'er all the spacious earth, o'er the wide ways, announce to men, preach and proclaim the bright belief and baptize folk beneath the skies, turn them to heaven. Break idols, cast them down and hate them. Extinguish enmity, sow peace in minds of men by virtue of your powers. I will ever stay with you in solace, and will keep you in peace with steadfast strength in every place." Then suddenly a sound was heard, loud in the air, a band of heavenly angels, the messengers of glory, a beauteous host in legion came; our King departed through the temple's roof, where they beheld, they who watched the dear One's track, the chosen thanes, there in the meeting place they saw the Lord, the child divine ascend from earth into the heights.

Sad in soul, grief burning hot within their hearts, the disciples stand watching, gazing, when suddenly from the angelic hosts, resplendent, rejoicing and joying in the glory of the light that gleams from the Savior's brow, there bursts a song raptur-

ous, ecstatic, praising the Creator, the glory of all kings and out from the song comes high and clear, "Why bide ye here and stand about, ye Galilean men? Now see ye the true King, the Lord of Victory, manifestly wending to the skies. The chief of princes with their hosts of angels, the Lord of all mankind, up from hence will soar unto his native home, His Father-land."

The account here given does not follow closely that of any of the four gospels, but resembles the one found in Luke perhaps more than that found in any of the others. The poet speaks of Christ's passing up through the temple roof. But it is not probable that he meant any thing other than a figurative expression for the sky. St. Luke mentions that Christ lead the disciples out of Jerusalem to Bethany and there was caught up from among them. But in none of the four gospels is there an attendant band of heavenly retainers. The poet supplies the deficiency.

After the ascension, the disciples turn back to Jerusalem. "There was unbroken weeping. Their faithful hearts were overwhelmed with grief."

At this point, in the second section of the ascension, the poet introduces an explanation of the presence of that band of angels.

There was an apocryphal tradition to the effect that, when Christ was buried, he descended into hell, bound Satan and released the captive souls in Satan's kingdom. This tradition is spoken of as "The Harrowing of Hell" and is a part of the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus*.

A curiosity contained in the fourth section of the ascension is a poetic setting of a comment found in one of Gregory's homilies on the passage in the "Song of Solomon" in which Christ is spoken of as coming "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." Gregory gives the number of leaps as six and so does Cynewulf and defines them in twenty-two interesting lines, the first being his incarnation, the second, his birth; the third, the crucifixion; the fourth, the burial; the fifth, the Harrowing of Hell; the sixth, the ascension.

* The Anglo-Saxon gospel of Nicodemus has been edited by Mr. W. H. Hulme and may be found in the "Publications of the Modern Language Association of America." Vol. XIII, No. 4, 1898.

Ascension Pt. III recounts the reasons why it is fitting that the tribes of men should give thanks to God. "He giveth us food and fullness of possessions, wealth over the spacious earth, and gentle weather under the heaven's protection; sun and moon, noblest of lights, heaven's candles, shine for all men on the earth alike, dew falleth and rain; they call forth abundance to nourish life for all the race of men, earth's riches increase!" But most of all should we give thanks and praise for the hope of salvation which Christ gave to us at his ascension. The ancient decree, "I wrought thee on earth and on it shalt thou live in want, shalt dwell in toil, and await vengeance, shalt sing the death-song for thy foes' delight, and shalt be turned again to that same earth with worms o'er charged, whence thou shalt seek thereafter the fire of punishment,"—has been averted and provision, by the atonement, has been made for our soul's peace. Further, God's spirit son has ennobled us and given us gifts. "To one he sendeth from memory's seat the charm of wise words. * * * He can sing and say full many things within whose soul is hidden the power of wisdom. One can * * * wake the harp and greet the glee beam; one can expound aright the law divine; one can tell the constellation's course; * * * one can cunningly write the spoken word; to one he giveth battle speed, when in the fight the shooters send the storm of darts, swift flying arrow work over the shield's defense; one can boldly o'er the salt sea drive the ocean wood and stir the water's rush; one can ascend the lofty steep; another can work the steeled sword and weapon; while yet another knoweth the plains' direction and the wide ways." To any one will not all of these gifts be made lest pride injure him.

Pt. V anticipates the third section—Judgment. On account of all these gifts and mercies, sore will fare the one that keepeth not the commands of the Savior. Terror will fill the heart of him who hath not kept the words of the Prince of Glory, when he cometh a second time to judge the earth. Quaking and fearful shall they await the wrath of Him whom worlds obey, shall see their earthly gifts and laurels consumed in the fire that shall rage and stride fiercely with its ruddy flame, bright and swift, over the wide world. Plains shall crumble, citadels crash, ancient treas-

ures rise in smoke. God's kindness to man during probation, abused, will turn to sternness and wrath. The heavens shall shake and earth shall wail. Crime stained mortals shall be purged in fire, in a bath of flames. The cry of mourning, the terror of man shall mingle with the noises of the heavens, and he who is sinning would gladly part with all the wealth of the transient earth for a place in which to hide from the angry rush of a wrathful God coming in triumph.

Life is like the sea over which we fare in ships; gliding over the ocean-flood, over the water cold, driving the flood-wood through the spacious sea with horses of the deep. "A perilous stream is this with boundless waves and these are stormy seas, on which we toss about. * * * The way was hard ere we had sailed unto the land. The help that came to us that brought us to the haven of salvation was God's spirit son, which gave us grace so that we may know even from the vessel's deck where we must bind with anchor fast our ocean steeds, old stallions of the waves." And the second section concludes with a prayer:—"O let us rest our hope in that same haven which the ruler of sky opened for us, holy on high, when he to heaven ascended."

Listen! From the four corners of the earth comes the sound of trumpets. It is the day of judgment. The midearth quakes and the region under men. Boldly and gloriously the tones sing and chant from North and South, from East and West, o'er all creation, waking aghast from the tomb the sons of warrior men and all mankind and bidding them arise from their deep sleep and appear unto the final doom. Then a sunbeam from the south shall light the path of the Son of God as he appears from the vaults of heaven full of menace to some, but to the blessed, glorious.

"Then the great creation shall resound and before the Lord shall go the greatest of all raging fires throughout the spacious earth, hot flame shall roar, the heavens shall burst, the steadfast and bright planets shall fall down. Then shall the sun be changed, all swart to the hue of blood, the sun which brightly shone for the sons of men above the former world. Likewise the moon, which erewhile gave light for mankind in the night, shall fall adown and the stars too shall descend from heaven, tempest-driven through the stormy air."

God shall select the righteous from the wicked and "then through the spacious plain the voice of heaven's trumpet shall be heard aloud and on the seven sides the wind shall howl and blow and break with greatest noise, and wake and waste the world with storms and with their breath o'erflow the world's creation. Then a hard crash, loud, immeasurable, heavy and violent, the greatest of fierce dins, terrible for mortals, shall be manifest. Then legions of the race of men accurst shall wend in multitudes into wider flame and living shall there feel destroying fires, some up, some down, fulfilled with burning."

Then follows, in the second, third, and fourth sections of the last third of the poem, a vivid account of the details of judgment where the thoughts and deeds of man since the beginning are laid bare before the Almighty Judge, who receives the righteous into the radiant beauty of his Father's realm, which home, joyfully, before all worlds, was made ready for them when with the best beloved they might behold life's riches, the sweet delights of heaven. But to the unrighteous he recounts his experience with man, the fall, the banishment from Eden, his own coming in human guise to redeem man, the crucifixion and all the martyrdom he endured for man till then, the buffetings, the scourgings, the insults and all, in the case of these, to no avail, for in the hardness of their hearts they turned from him, "and now," he proclaims, "I claim of thee that life which thou hast sinfully destroyed with vice to thine own shame. Render me thy life, for which in martyrdom, I gave thee once mine own as price. Why hast thou filthily defiled, by thine own will, through wicked lusts and through foul sin, thy tabernacle which I sanctified in thee to be the cherished home of my delight? . . . Ye denied help to the poor . . . succor to the needy . . . comfort to the sorrowful. . . . Ye did this in scorn of me, heaven's King; wherefore . . . Go, now accursed, wilfully cut off from angel's joy, into eternal fire, which hot and fiercely grim was dight for the devil Satan and his comrades too and, all that swarthy shoal; therein shall ye fall."

Sweeps then the victory sword and into the deep gulf, into the swart flame plunges the devil and his hosts to be wrapped in flame, lapped in eternal fire. Sorrow and penitence now avail

naught to that one who in this life refused his opportunity for eternal salvation. Improve the opportunity then in this life, foster zealously the beauty of the soul, be wary in words and deeds, in habits and thoughts, while this world, speeding with its shadows, may still shine for man. And as a reward accept everlasting life, "begirt with light, bewrapt in peace, shielded from sorrow." In that land "there shall be angels' song; bliss of the happy; the cherished presence of the Lord brighter than the sun; . . . life without death's end; a gladsome host of men; youth without age; the glory of heavenly chivalry." A glorious clime where there shall be for the blessed "health without pain, rest without toil, day without gloom, where radiant and joyful there shall be happiness without sorrow, friendship without feud, peace without enmity, where there is neither hunger nor thirst, sleep nor sickness, heat nor cold nor care; but where the company of the blest, the fairest of all hosts, shall there forever enjoy their Sovran's grace and glory with their King.

The personal element in the Christ is intense. The poet deploras the natural proneness of man toward evil, beseeches the throne of grace for pardon, repents his years misspent and breaks forth in songs of rejoicing and praise that the power that rules over all has provided a pardon large enough to cover all of man's transgression.

The "Christ" is more than a homily in verse*, it is a series of lyrics that suggests a choral ending†, that contains passage after passage of thanksgiving and celebration of the attributes of the Redeemer. The poem would fall into that class of work influenced directly by monasticism in England and is distinctively Christian in tone. It possesses gorgeousness of ornamentation, unique conceits, strength of imagery, great vividness of dramatic description and often a marked floridity of style. The angels are spoken of as "wrapt in harmony" and the angelic hosts pictured as flying as near as possible to the fierce light of the throne. The familiar similes of the Son of Man coming in judgment as a thief in the night "even as some wily robber, some daring thief that prowleth in the dark in the swart night,"

*Courthope's "History of English poetry," Vol. 1. p. 103.

†Stopford Brooke's "History of Eng. Literature," p. 390.

and life being like a sea o'er which we pass in boats are said to be the first similies in Anglo-Saxon poetry*. And what scene can be more awfully dramatic than when on the judgment day the Rood, the sacred tree on which Christ hung—for which in an agony of shame and grief full many a tree beneath its bark was suffused with tears, bloody and thick, the sap all turned to gore—the Rood stood high to heaven before the children of men, gleaming with a light that dimmed the light of the sun, dripping with the holy blood of heaven's King, moistened with the sweat of his death agony. There men beheld even the ancient gaping wounds whose lips though mute spoke eloquently of the anguish Christ suffered at the hands of those whom he came to redeem.

The poem abounds in variety and richness of epithet. Mary is the "choicest of maidens," "damsel renowned." The ships are "horses of the deep," "flood-wood," "ocean steeds," "old stallions of the waves." The power of evil is represented as "accursed wolf," "beast of darkness," "man's destroyer," "the mind's destroyer," "accursed hell-sprites," "hated hell-fiends," and the wicked spoken of as "shoals of the pernicious." Christ is the "Great Leader in Bethany," "Helm of Glory," "Lord Majestic," Bounteous Dispenser," "Splendour's Lord," "Heaven's Lord," "Source of Man's Life," "Creation's Source," "God's Spirit Son," "The Savior Child," "Glory's Treasury," "The Lord of Empire."

Such in the abstract is the poem "Christ" in which the two poetic elements of Prayer and Praise predominate. The sources of the poem are few and so scanty that they can be called really no more than suggestions—a Latin homily, a Latin poem, an apocryphal tradition. These are all that, aside from the scriptural narratives, can be said to have influenced to any extent this poem of Cynewulf. And the influence of these was slight, a clause or at most a sentence or two, furnishing the idea that stirred in the poet's mind a perfect rush of song, that poured forth full and glorious in bursts of sustained and triumphant harmony. The idea was from without, the song was his own, and the passionate throbblings of a poet's soul, of a devout poet's soul, the flood of melody in lyric after lyric, the beauty of fancy, the

*Ten Brink: Vol. 1, p. 55.

ruggedness and grandeur of diction, the quickness of appreciation of dramatic situations and their possibilities, the intensity of the personal element bring us in this product of Cynewulf's art most closely to the poet who wrote so much and left no known record save in his work, and even for whose name the runes were forced to give up their secrets.



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